

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the Modes of Mind and Mental Factors

Lesson No: 29

Date: 4th October 2012

Root text: *A Necklace for Those of Clear Awareness Clearly Revealing the Modes of Minds and Mental Factors* by Ye-she Gyeltsen, translated by Toh Sze Gee; January 2006 edition. Copyright: Toh Sze Gee & FPMT, Inc. September 2003.

All page references refer to the root text, unless otherwise stated.

The Four Changeable Mental Factors

There are four changeable mental factors:

- (1) sleep
- (2) regret
- (3) investigation
- (4) analysis

(1) Sleep

Regarding sleep, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is sleep?

RESPONSE: It is a withdrawal of the mind in dependence upon sleep, its cause, with respect to:

- virtue, non-virtue and the unspecified,
 - the timely and the untimely,
 - and the appropriate and the inappropriate,
- and is involved with ignorance. It has the function of acting as a support for failing to perform actions.

Just as it has been said above, it is an awareness that causes the engagement in objects of the sense consciousness to powerlessly withdraw inwards in dependence upon its causes, such as heaviness of body, weakness, fatigue, and attention to signs of darkness (Pages 83 – 84).

- The object of observation of sleep is either virtue, non-virtue, or the unspecified.
- Its aspect is the withdrawal of the mind inwards and it is a withdrawal that happens powerlessly.
- Its function is that it acts as a support for failing to perform actions.

Sleep is a mental factor so it is a consciousness but it may be difficult for this to fit our mind, i.e., the notion of thinking of sleep as a type of mind.

Next is the explanation of the words, “timely and untimely,” so there is timely sleep and untimely sleep.

Here, regarding “the timely and the untimely” [in the citation above], it is just as it has been said by the Protector Nagarjuna [in his *Letter to a Friend*] (stanza 39):

Sensible ones! Occupy yourselves the entire daytime and
Also the first and last parts of the night.
Sleep with mindfulness between these;

Then even the time of sleep will not be wasted.

Just as it has been said above, the middle watch of the night is the time for sleep, ...(Page 84)

That is timely sleep. What follows is untimely sleep:

... whereas the first and the last watches of the night, as well as daytime, not being the time for sleep, are times for making effort in the application of virtue. Hence it is taught in this way for the purpose of comprehending these modes (Page 84).

When we divide the entire day into daytime and nighttime, any kind of sleep during the day is considered to be untimely. The first part of the night and the last part of the night are also considered untimely periods for sleep. The time that is considered suitable for sleeping is the middle part of the night. If we were to say that the first part of the night starts from 7pm till 10pm, then perhaps 10pm – 3am is the middle part of the night and the last part of the night would be 3am – 6am.

Next is the explanation of “the appropriate and inappropriate.”

Regarding “the appropriate and the inappropriate” [in the citation above], sleeping during the middle watch of the night out of the wish to engage in virtue by developing the elements of the body is appropriate, whereas sleep motivated by afflictions, even during the middle watch of the night, is inappropriate. Hence it is taught for the sake of understanding this (Page 84).

Since sleep is divided into timely and untimely sleep, we have to engage in timely sleep.

There is also appropriate and inappropriate sleep. We also have to engage in appropriate sleep. As mentioned in the lam-rim, at this time when we have obtained a human life of freedoms and endowments, we should strive in virtue, day and night. Therefore the importance of engaging in timely and appropriate sleep is greatly emphasised in the context of having a human life of freedoms and endowments.

If we were to live for eighty years, half of that lifespan would have been spent in sleep. Whether our sleep is worthwhile or not depends on whether we have engaged in timely and appropriate sleep, and whether we know how to fall asleep properly. That is why sleeping properly is emphasised. Otherwise all the time you had spent sleeping, perhaps half your life would have gone to waste.

Since such a great part of our life is spent sleeping, this is essential advice on how we can make this time meaningful. Making sleep meaningful is dependent on the motivation. It is important to fall asleep and engage in sleep with a virtuous state of mind.

When one is about to fall asleep, one should try to do so while maintaining a virtuous state of mind, i.e., falling asleep with virtuous thoughts. One should also generate the intention to be able to wake up early or at the right time to continue one’s virtuous practices. When we

have this kind of intention and motivation, it makes those hours of sleep—be it two, three, four, or five hours—worthwhile and meaningful.

Sleep here is classified as a changeable mental factor because sleep can either be virtuous or non-virtuous, depending on the motivation.

Its function is specified as "failing to perform actions" because, since sleep is of two types – the virtuous and the non-virtuous – the non-virtuous type, afflicted sleep, causes virtuous activities to degenerate (Page 84).

The function specified here of "failing to perform actions" refers mainly to non-virtuous sleep. The essence is this: it is important to fall asleep with a virtuous state of mind, with the intention to wake up to continue one's virtuous practices.

Question: What is the meaning of “developing of the elements of the body, (Page 84)”?

Answer: The body is made up of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. You will be in good health when these four elements are in equilibrium and balanced. By engaging in timely sleep, the elements in the body will be in equilibrium. That promotes your health and your ability to engage in actions.

When the elements in the body are imbalanced, it affects our health and our ability to do engage in activities. Therefore there is a need to develop the elements of the body because there is a close connection between our body and mind.

The purpose of sleeping is so that you are rested and can continue with your virtuous practices. When we are engaging in virtuous practices, the mind must be very strong and powerful. Since the mind is dependent and closely related to the state of one's physical health, therefore it is important to develop the elements of the body. One can go to sleep with this motivation, thinking, “I am resting my body so that I can continue with my virtuous practices.”

(2) Regret

Regarding regret, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is regret?

RESPONSE: It is a remorseful mind dependent on any [proper] activity or improper activity, intended or unintended, with respect to:

- virtue, non-virtue and the unspecified,
- the timely and the untimely, and
- the appropriate and the inappropriate,

and is involved with ignorance. It has the function of hindering the stability of the mind.

Just as it has been said above, in dependence on:

- oneself having performed an appropriate or inappropriate activity deliberately or
- having been made to do so under duress,

being remorseful about that activity which one subsequently comes to dislike is called "generating regret" (Pages 84 – 85).

- The objects of observation of regret are either the activities that you performed yourself or were forced to do by someone else.

In some texts, the objects of observation are said to be activities performed by oneself and the activities performed by someone else. These two are different. I guess it is possible to develop regret for the actions of others. It is not mentioned in this text but some other texts state that you could develop regret for the actions of others. This is something for you to think about.

- Its aspect is dislike.

Regret is of three types:

- (1) virtuous
- (2) non-virtuous
- (3) unspecified

- (1) For instance, regret for past misdeeds belongs to the class of **virtue**.
- (2) For instance, regret for having created merit belongs to the class of **non-virtue**.
- (3) Regret for something that neither benefited nor harmed others, such as manual work, is **unspecified** (Page 85).

Next is an explanation of the terms, “the timely and the untimely, and the appropriate and the inappropriate” as they appear in the definition.

“The timely and the untimely, and the appropriate and the inappropriate” [in the citation above] means that generating regret when something is rectifiable is appropriate, whereas regret when it is not is inappropriate. Moreover, appropriateness of regret when it is rectifiable refers to, for instance, the necessity to confess misdeeds with regret before the fruition has been established in the present. Not rectifiable refers to, for instance, rebirth in a bad migration due to fruition having been established; since having been born blind, physically disabled, and so forth are occasions where the fruition has been established, they are irreversible (Page 85).

Conventionally speaking, people always talk about the importance of not regretting one’s actions, that it is not good to regret. However that statement is made in the context of regret in a situation where everything that can be done has been done already. It is finished, it is over, and you cannot do anything about the situation so it is pointless to regret. It is untimely because the situation is not rectifiable. It is too late to regret and therefore it is also inappropriate.

Timely regret is appropriate when you generate regret before the consequences have come into being, i.e., before the results come to fruition. Then you can do something about the situation. For example, you can engage in confession and purify those negativities. Regret is being remorseful about activities that subsequently one dislikes having done. When we have that kind of mind, it is very helpful when it comes to confessing one’s negativities because it makes the confession and purification more powerful.

So regret is a state of mind. It is not just words or repeating or reciting something. When we engage in confession, regret comes in the application

of the four opponent powers. At that time, it is important to apply timely regret.

Therefore, detailed examination of these passages from the *Compendium of Knowledge* seems to be a marvellous method for generating certainty regarding the stages of the path (Page 85).

- Regretting someone’s virtuous actions is probably negative and non-virtuous.
- But if we generate regret for the non-virtuous actions of others, that regret is virtuous.

Regret is classified as a changeable mental factor because regret could be virtuous, non-virtuous, or unspecified. There is no definite certainty about the nature of regret.

(3 & 4) Investigation and Analysis

Regarding investigation and analysis, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is investigation?

RESPONSE: It is a mental expression of inquiry depending on either intention or wisdom; it is a coarse mind.

QUESTION: What is analysis?

RESPONSE: It is a mental expression of individual examination depending on either intention or wisdom; it is a fine mind.

Their function is to act as a support for abiding in contact and not abiding in contact.

Just as it has been said above, investigation is an inquiry into the rough entities of objects as well as their names, whereas analysis analyzes with fine discrimination (Page 86).

Investigation is a coarse mind while analysis is a “fine” mind, i.e., it is finer in terms of looking at the subtle details of the object.

A Discussion of the Five Aggregates also says:

QUESTION: What is investigation?

RESPONSE: It is a mental expression of inquiry. It is a coarse mind [depending on] the particularities of either intention or wisdom.

QUESTION: What is analysis?

RESPONSE: It is a mental expression of individual examination. It is a fine mind [depending on] the particularities of either intention or wisdom.

The two brothers [Asanga and Vasubandhu] seem to agree on this explanation (Page 86).

- The objects of observation of investigation and analysis can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or unspecified.
- The aspect of investigation is coarseness and the aspect of analysis is analysing subtle details.
- Their functions are the same; they act as support for abiding in contact and not abiding in contact.

Next is the explanation of their functions. What is the meaning of “acting as a support for abiding in contact and not abiding in contact”?

Investigation and analysis are each of two types: (1) there is virtuous investigation and analysis, and (2) non-virtuous investigation and analysis.

The function of investigation and analysis is specified as "acting as a support for abiding in contact and not abiding in contact," because investigation and analysis are each of two types – the virtuous and the non-virtuous – whereby:

- investigation and analysis belonging to the class of virtue act to produce pleasant results, thus "acting as a support for abiding in contact" with happiness, and
- investigation and analysis belonging to the class of non-virtue act to produce unpleasant results, thus "acting as a support for not abiding in contact" with happiness (Page 86).

“Abiding in contact” here means abiding in contact with happiness.

- Investigation that engages with a virtuous object, its mode of engagement is coarse. That is virtuous investigation.
- Similarly analysis that engages with a virtuous object analyses the subtle details of that virtuous object. That is virtuous analysis.
- The opposites of those are non-virtuous investigation and analysis.

Moreover,

- investigation and fine analysis of the meaning of selflessness with the thought to definitely emerge from cyclic existence, and so forth belong to the class of **virtue**,
- investigation and fine analysis of the modes of pleasant or unpleasant objects motivated by attachment, anger, and so forth belong to the class of **non-virtue**, and
- analysis and investigation of work, behavior and so forth that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous minds are **unspecified** (Page 86).

Most of our investigation and analysis are non-virtuous because they engage with pleasant or unpleasant objects, motivated by our afflictions. Virtuous investigation and virtuous analysis are rare and difficult for us.

[Discussion of the category of changeable mental factors]

Why are these four – sleep, regret, investigation, and analysis – called "changeable"? They are called "changeable" because they become virtuous, non-virtuous, or unspecified through the force of being concomitant with the motivating thought (Page 86).

This is something to think about: when we talk about investigation and analysis, are they necessarily conceptual? Personally, I wonder whether they are necessarily so. I think they are probably not necessarily conceptual but it is something that we need to think about.

Afflicted sleep, regret, investigation, and analysis obscure the entire class of virtue in general, and especially the three trainings [in ethics, meditative stabilization, and wisdom].

The "five obscurations" are taught in sutra. They are just as they have been taught by the Protector Nagarjuna [in *Letter to a Friend*] (stanza 44):

- [1] Excitement and regret,
 - [2] harmful intent,
 - [3] Sleep and lethargy,
 - [4] aspiration for the desire realm, and [5] doubt
- Are the five obscurations. Be aware that
They are thieves
Who steal away the wealth of virtue (Pages 86 – 87).

The five obscurations are listed here. Next is the explanation of how they obscure the three higher trainings.

Furthermore,

- aspiration for the attributes of the desire realm and harmful intent mainly obscure the higher training in ethics;
- sleep, lethargy, excitement, and regret mainly obscure the higher training in concentration [i.e., meditative stabilization];
- doubt, investigation, and analysis mainly obscure the higher training in wisdom (Page 87).

It is obvious how doubt can obscure one's higher training in wisdom. But what about investigation and analysis? I am not sure how these two can obscure the training in wisdom.

If we were to interpret the higher training in wisdom to refer specifically to the meditative equipoise focussing single-pointedly on emptiness, then of course investigation and analysis would be a hindrance or obstruction. Since you are supposed to be in meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness, while you are in that state, any kind of investigation and analysis will hinder your meditative stabilisation. But I am not sure whether this is the explanation here. Otherwise we still have to account for how investigation and analysis obscure the higher training in wisdom.

Khen Rinpoche: Does anyone have any ideas?

The question is: how does the investigation and analysis obscure the higher training of wisdom?

Student: If you were to investigate and analyse things like the sciences, of course it will take away your time from training in wisdom.

Khen Rinpoche: If that is the case, investigation and analysis would also obscure the higher training of concentration. Why are these two specifically mentioned as the obscuring factors for wisdom?

We can understand how doubt can interfere with our training in wisdom but how does investigation and analysis hinder one's training in wisdom? If we follow your explanation, then investigation and analysis will also obscure the higher training in concentration.

The next paragraph talks about how these five obscurations obscure ethics and concentration.

Also, the *Compendium of Knowledge* teaches that these five obscurations obscure ethics and meditative stabilization, whereas [Shantirakshita's] *Commentary on the Twenty Verses on the Bodhisattva Vows (Samvaravimsakavr̥tti)* explains that only meditative stabilization is obscured. In brief, although there appear many modes of explanation in the upper and lower *Knowledges* and numerous lengthy explanations in other texts, since they are very extensive, I cannot discuss them all here (Page 87).

Question: How can virtuous sleep and virtuous regret obscure meditative stabilisation?

Answer: Whether it is virtuous or non-virtuous sleep, they are both obstacles to developing concentration.

Regret is posited as a remorseful mind of disliking. I guess you could say that regret can interfere with concentration precisely because of what regret is, i.e., it is a remorseful mind of disliking.

Student: Going back to investigation and analysis. A non-Buddhist would investigate the “I” to be permanent, unitary, and independent while a proponent of the lower tenets would investigate and analyse the “I” to exist inherently. Would those be the main obstacles for training in wisdom?

Khen Rinpoche: What is the object of analysis?

Student: The “I” that does not exist.

Khen Rinpoche: We have to think about whether investigation and analysis are necessarily factually concordant minds.

Sleep is classified as a changeable mental factor whereas lethargy is classified as a secondary affliction. When listed among the five obscurations, why are they counted as one?

RESPONSE: Generally, lethargy and sleep are not the same. Since lethargy is involved with ignorance and sleep can either be virtuous or non-virtuous, lethargy is said to be a secondary affliction, and sleep a changeable mental factor. Similarly, with regard to excitement and regret, since excitement is involved with attachment, and regret can either be virtuous or non-virtuous, excitement is said to be a secondary affliction and regret a changeable mental factor. [Each of these two pairs of mental factors] are taken to be one in the context of the five obscurations because:

- they are produced from the same cause,
- they are abandoned by the same antidote, and
- they accord in having the same function.

That they are produced from the same **cause** refers to the following:

- Both lethargy and sleep are produced from overeating, an unhappy mind, a discouraged mind, relishing taste, and so forth.
- Both excitement and regret are produced from conceptions of having indulged in the attributes of the desire realm, having fun, laughing, and so forth in the past, and from the notion that one will not die and the like.

That they are abandoned by the same **antidote** refers to the following:

- both lethargy and sleep are dispelled by the discrimination of illumination, and
- excitement and regret are dispelled by holding the mind inwards on an object of observation.

That they accord in having the same **function** refers to the following:

- since both lethargy and sleep cause discouragement within the mind, they hinder meditative stabilization and especially the clarity of the objects of observation, and
- since both excitement and regret hinder single-pointed abiding, their functions accord (Pages 87 – 88).

These are the reasons for counting sleep and lethargy as one, and excitement and regret as one in the context of the five obscurations.

Here I say:

Having strongly tied us with thousands of nooses of karma
To the prison of [cyclic] existence since beginningless time,

The enemies who torture us with hundreds of unbearable sufferings and agonies
Are certainly the afflictions themselves.

In the wilderness covered by thickets of [cyclic] existence,
The intolerable thieves who steal even the slightest benefit and happiness
And torment us without allowing a single moment's relief
Are just those [afflictions].

Alas! Who is more foolish than one who holds this enemy from beginningless time
As his dear friend, planting him at the center of his heart,
But holds as enemies his kind father and mother sentient beings,
The six types of migrators?

Hey! Instead, if intelligent discerning people were to
Uproot the enemy of afflictions from their hearts and
Cherish their kind parents, planting these wish-fulfilling gems
At the very center of their hearts, it would be far better! (Page 89)

This is advice from the author. The reason why we study the lists of the afflictions—the six root afflictions and the 20 secondary afflictions—is to be able to identify them, seeing that they are the real enemies and not other sentient beings.

2. A summary of the salient points and their application to practice

Having thus understood the presentation of minds and mental factors, it is important to know how to use it as a method for subduing one's own continuum. Otherwise, if one takes delight in merely arguing with others, holding forth just to prove one's point or pedantically listing synonyms, then there is not much purpose. It is just as it has been said in the *King of Meditative Stabilizations Sutra*:

Although I have explained the good doctrine,
If you do not put it into practice correctly after having heard it,
Then you are like a sick person who clutches a bag of medicines,
But is unable to cure his sickness (Page 90).

It is just as it has been said in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* (stanza 5.108):

In brief,
To examine the state of body and mind
Again and again,
Is the sole defining characteristic of guarding introspection.

The Protector Nagarjuna says [in *Letter to a Friend*] (stanza 17):

Know that the mind is like a drawing
Made on water, earth, or stone.
From among these, in regard to the afflicted, the first is best, and
In regard to wishing for the Dharma, the last (Pages 90 – 91)

The analogy used here is that of a drawing made on water, earth, and stone:

- With regard to virtuous minds, they should be like drawings made on stone because such drawings are very long-lasting and stable.
- With regard to our afflictions, they should be like drawings made on water because drawings made on water do not last and can be easily removed. We should deal with our afflictions in such a way.

The essential purpose of studying about these minds and their mental factors is to be able to cultivate a very strong virtuous state of mind, making sure that it is stable and long-lasting. At the same time, we make sure that we deal with our afflictions immediately when they arise so that they do not last for long.

Gon-pa-wa said:

In order to abandon the afflictions, you must know the drawbacks, the defining characteristics, and the antidotes of the afflictions, as well as the causes for their production. Having understood their drawbacks, regard them as faults and hold them as enemies. Without understanding their drawbacks, you will not understand that they are enemies ...

Just as it has been said above, as soon as an affliction arises in your continuum, having forcefully recognized it, thinking, "This is it! It has arisen!" you must examine which causes and conditions produced it, and what the object of observation from which it arose is, and then, regarding it as a fault, hold it as an enemy and immediately overcome it with the antidote (Page 91).

Ye-[shes]-bar, if, tomorrow or the next day, someone were to ask all your disciples, "What are you practicing as the core of quintessential instructions?" they would answer that it was to attain clairvoyance or a vision of their personal deity. However, they should answer, "Having become more and more certain about the cause and result of actions, we are practicing to guard purely whatever vows we have committed ourselves to." Therefore, an "attainment of meditation" refers to the afflictions, such as ignorance, becoming weaker and weaker (Page 92).

What does it mean to be successful or to achieve an attainment from one's daily practice or in one's retreat?

- Whether it is one's daily practice or retreat, when we see our afflictions becoming weaker over time, that is the sign of having actualised the attainments.
- Similarly when one's conviction in cause and effect and the workings of karma increase, that is a very clear sign that you have achieved something in your practice.
- When your ability to practise ethics increases, that is an attainment.

So it is not about being clairvoyant or cultivating the ability to see deities. The real result is that the afflictions are weakened.

The author then confesses any mistakes he may have made in his explanation so he says:

I, owing to inferior merit, am born at the end of time;
My eye of awareness is hazy and my training poor.
Therefore, whatever I have failed to explain or have explained wrongly here,
I confess to the wise (Pages 93 – 94).

This also applies to me. During the course of this module, there were some correct explanations and perhaps there were also many more incorrect explanations. Even so, if there were mistakes, they were not made intentionally. So in my case, I also have to confess.

Their eye of awareness polluted by unbearable *dadura* [poison],
Their hearts agitated by the evil spirits of the eight worldly concerns,
Even though they belittle me and are infuriated,
I shall have nothing to do with them.

Then there is the dedication of merits:
[Root text: page 94]
By this virtue, may I and all migrating beings,
Come under the care of the holy spiritual guides of the supreme vehicle, and
Become holders of all the modes
Of the profound and extensive Dharma without exception.

Attaining the eloquence of self-reliance
In regard to what is very difficult to fathom,
In order to liberate all migrating beings without exception,

May I become just like the supreme guru Manjushri!(Page 94).

This is the dedication. One prays to be able to be like Lama Tsongkhapa: to be able to engage in extensive hearing and contemplation on the profound and extensive teachings of the Buddha, always to be taken care of by the Mahayana gurus, and to be able to be of great benefit to sentient beings.

Trying to study the workings of the mind and the mental factors is not easy. It is challenging. In my case, it is also challenging to think about these topics although I have completed years of studies.

But whatever the case may be, all of us, including myself, have planted imprints in our minds. It is something we should rejoice in and feel happy about. We need to keep in mind the need to continue to learn the teachings of the Buddha while we are still able to do so.

The Exam

There is nothing much to say about the exam.

- It always goes back to the seven-fold divisions of consciousness. You should have a rough understanding of what they are.
- What is the difference between a sense consciousness and a mental consciousness?
- What are the conditions that are required for a sense consciousness to arise?
- What are the conditions that are necessary for the mental consciousness to arise?
- What is the difference between a non-conceptual mind and a conceptual mind?

I guess most of the questions will be based on these points.

The function of the exam is to act as a support for learning. If your wish to take part in the exam does not fulfil this goal, then it is better that you do not come.

There may be some questions on the mental factors but I am not sure. I haven't thought about the exam questions yet.

[After the dedication prayers]

Classes will only resume after about four months' time. It will be good if you can get into the habit of constantly reading the texts. Otherwise when you don't read, that can become an obstacle. Once you break the habit of reading the texts, it becomes an obstacle.

Every now and then, perhaps those who wish to do so, you can come together for discussions.

If you want to engage in preliminary practices for the purpose of accumulating merit and purifying negativities, such as prostrations, mandala offerings, and so forth, you can also organise groups to do this together.

As the break is quite long, during this time, if you completely break away from the Dharma and the centre, that will become a very big obstacle. So it is important not to do that. You should put aside time to come and engage in some of these activities.

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng, and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong